

DAV[®]

MAGAZINE

MAY | JUNE 2026



HEROES VS. LEGENDS

Veterans face football greats in the DAV Bowl

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Orlando to host 2026 DAV and Auxiliary National Convention

Aug. 1-4, 2026 | Rosen Shingle Creek

This year, DAV's annual national convention returns to sunny Orlando, Florida. Known for its attractions and entertainment, "The City Beautiful" ensures visitors of all ages have an experience they'll never forget.

The convention is an opportunity to advocate for ill and injured veterans, enjoy the camaraderie of fellow DAV members, and take ownership of the organization and its yearly agenda—while allowing for a hearty dose of fun in this premier vacation destination.

Orlando offers something for everyone: family-friendly attractions; world-class dining and entertainment; top-notch golf courses and other recreational activities; and, of course, beautiful weather.

After you spend time working alongside fellow veterans to help shape DAV's future, an array of one-of-a-kind experiences awaits you. Convention-goers can experience the magic of Walt Disney World, the

sights and sounds of Universal Orlando, the wonders of the marine life at SeaWorld, the world-class shopping at Pointe Orlando or the breathtaking views atop the 400-foot Wheel at ICON Park, just to name a few. Florida's world-famous beaches and Kennedy Space Center are also only an hour away.

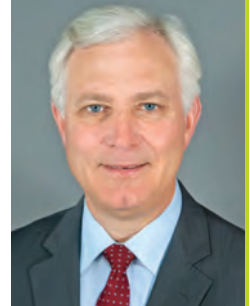
Attendees enjoy a special room rate at the Rosen Shingle Creek of \$149 per single or double. Additional hotel reservation information is available at dav.la/4rCWPOZ or by calling 866-996-6338. Be sure to say you are reserving under the Disabled American Veterans room block if making reservations by phone. ■



For more information and to link to the hotel's DAV room block, scan the QR code or visit dav.org/events/2026-national-convention.

TRAVEL ASSISTANCE The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) can facilitate the screening of injured or wounded veterans. After making flight reservations, veterans (or their care coordinators) should contact a TSA Cares representative by calling toll-free 855-787-2227 weekdays from 8 a.m. to 11 p.m. and weekends and holidays from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. Eastern time. A representative will either provide screening information relevant to the veteran's disability or refer the veteran to experts at TSA for help through the screening process.

From the NATIONAL COMMANDER COLEMAN NEE



Honoring surviving families

Veterans' families and survivors carry a legacy forged in sacrifice. They didn't serve in uniform, yet they serve every day in the quiet endurance of loss. As a nation, our obligation to them isn't symbolic—it's binding. Recognition must be accompanied by action, and gratitude must be expressed through policy that delivers stability, dignity and long-term support.

That's why one of DAV's 2026 Critical Policy Goals is to modernize survivors benefits for military families.

When a service member dies in the line of duty or a veteran dies as the result of a service-connected condition, beyond their grief, surviving spouses and dependents face financial uncertainty. Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) is intended to mitigate that burden. Yet for too many families, the benefit doesn't fully reflect the economic reality of losing a spouse, parent or caregiver. Strengthening DIC and other survivors benefits isn't about expanding government; it's about honoring a solemn promise.

DIC rates must keep pace with modern cost-of-living pressures and accurately reflect the true financial impact of a service-connected death. That's why DAV supports the bipartisan Caring for Survivors Act, which would increase the DIC rate of a 100%-disabled veteran from 41% to 55%. Other provisions in the bill include expanding benefits to match other federal programs and reducing the required total disability rating period for a veteran from 10 to five years.

Equally important is the Love Lives On Act. This DAV-supported, bipartisan legislation addresses a long-standing inequity in federal survivors benefits. Under current law, remarriage before age 55 can trigger the loss of certain benefits for surviving spouses, effectively penalizing them for rebuilding their lives. The Love Lives On Act corrects that injustice by allowing surviving spouses to retain key benefits if they remarry, also aligning Department of Veterans Affairs policies with other federal survivors programs.

No surviving spouse should be forced to choose between companionship and financial security. Remarriage doesn't erase sacrifice. It doesn't diminish the memory of a fallen service member or lessen the nation's obligation to the family left behind. The Love Lives On Act affirms that love, healing and forward movement shouldn't come at the expense of earned support.

Recognition of surviving families must extend beyond ceremonial observances. It requires sustained advocacy to modernize survivors benefits, close policy gaps and ensure long-term economic stability. Strengthening DIC and enacting these key pieces of legislation are tangible steps toward fulfilling that responsibility.

Our nation asked much of those who served. For the families who bore the ultimate cost, we must ensure that their sacrifices are neither forgotten nor undervalued. ■

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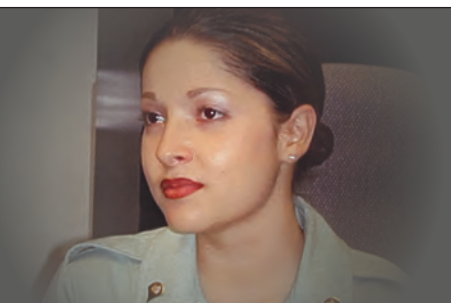
At the 2026 DAV Mid-Winter Conference, advocates turned setbacks into victories for veterans.



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Coleman Nee

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From the NATIONAL ADJUTANT BARRY A. JESINOSKI



Why showing up still matters

For all the ways technology has changed our world, the fundamentals of change remain the same.

We can meet online. We can organize digitally. We can send messages farther and faster than ever before. Those tools matter—and DAV uses them every day. But one truth remains: leadership still requires showing up. Physically. Consistently. And with purpose.

That lesson was reinforced again at our mid-winter conference. Hundreds of DAV leaders traveled to Washington, D.C., not because it was convenient but because, in an increasingly connected world, presence still reigns supreme. When leaders show up, they send a signal—to lawmakers and veterans alike—that the work matters and the mission is real.

There's a difference between being informed and being engaged. Progress begins when observation turns into action.

DAV has never led from a distance. Our century-long history was built by veterans who understood that waiting for others to act is a recipe for failure. They also knew that stepping forward—often when uncomfortable, inconvenient or unpopular—creates the victories we see today.

It can be easy for leaders to sit behind a screen and assume their advocacy is visible. But veterans don't experience change virtually. They experience it in exam rooms, at VA medical centers, inside DAV offices and in communities that may never fully understand the weight they carry.

Meeting veterans where they are has always meant presence.

We need leaders who attend chapter meetings and don't just read the minutes afterward. Leaders who take pride in DAV's mission, who speak up in rooms where decisions are made even when silence would be easier.

Leadership can't be passive. Momentum isn't self-propelling; it's sustained by people willing to invest time and show up. Showing up builds trust; trust builds influence. And influence is what turns good intentions into real outcomes for veterans who depend on us every day.

Mid-winter reminded me of what happens when DAV leaders do exactly that. Ideas move faster. Problems are addressed sooner. Relationships strengthen, and purpose sharpens. That only comes from commitment.

DAV will continue pushing forward on the issues that matter most to veterans. But our victories depend on members staying engaged at every level.

Leadership and advocacy have never been spectator roles. Veterans notice who shows up, who listens, and who keeps going long after events end and headlines fade.

Our next hundred years require those willing to step off the sidelines and into the work. That's how DAV has moved the needle for America's veterans and their families, caregivers and survivors. And that's how we always will. ■

'Frost and Fire'

Reading William Bolden's story in "Frost and Fire" (January/February 2026) made my eyes tear up and my heart sink, but eventually I smiled. As a former infantryman, I could feel those cold feet in freezing water causing frostbite but can only imagine the combat wounds he received. And then to not receive a disability rating! Thank you, DAV and benefits advocate Danny Soto, for helping this hero get the compensation he deserves and telling his story. **Jeff LaPlume, Columbia Falls, Montana**

Rule change reversal

Kudos to Commander Nee, the DAV team and all who rallied to get the VA to halt its decision to adjust disability ratings for veterans on medication. In a matter of days, DAV led the way to shut that down and then followed up to make certain that anxious veterans knew the threat had passed. As the commander said, no one should ever have to worry that taking the medications they need to survive could hurt their ability to care for themselves and their families. Veterans of all generations need to be prepared to rally when bad ideas surface that could hurt our community. We can do even better, but the actions we took and the impact shows why veterans should be involved in our organization. **Trent Dilks, Kimball, Minnesota**

Claim sharks

Fighting fraud and claim sharks absolutely matters. Veterans shouldn't be exploited. But we also need to be honest about why those bad actors exist in the first place. The current VA claims process is so adversarial, slow and bureaucratic that it creates the exact environment scammers thrive in. When predictable [injuries tied to high risk military occupations] still require years of proof, repeat exams and appeals, veterans get desperate. A smarter fix is structural, not just enforcement. Presumptive or

automatic schedular ratings based on MOS would cut most of this off at the source. Treat combat arms, aviation, armor and toxic-exposure fields like the occupational hazards to physical and mental health that they are. Simpler system. Fewer appeals. Less friction. Less fraud. Better outcomes.

James Williams, via Facebook

'Always have hope'

I am a 100% service-connected DAV life member. Thank you, DAV! I went to different service officers at the VA and received no help, no encouragement and no support. When I asked DAV for help, not only did they help file my claim, they got me the support I needed from the VA. I had been told I shouldn't hold out any hope for "service-connected" on my first filing. DAV told me to always have hope. Then I got my awards letter—permanent and total 100% service-connected disabled with two years' back pay. Please, if you can help, donate to DAV. They are in my will. They help all veterans. Sometimes, they're the only ones who will. **Constance Malone, Seattle, Washington**

Field of Flags

At Campbell Ridge Elementary School, we make it our mission to recognize and honor the service and sacrifice of our community's veterans. Each year, we invite them to our schoolwide assembly so we can honor their service and educate our students on the significance of Veterans Day and the customs and traditions of our military. This annual school tradition continues to grow each year. This year, we had the opportunity to add our first DAV Field of Flags. This was the perfect

addition to our school's Veterans Day activities because it allowed us to go beyond recognition and education and take action to raise money to support our veterans. Our veterans loved seeing the Field of Flags as they arrived at our school on Veterans Day, and our students were able to see the Field of Flags as they arrived and departed school each day. This was a great reminder of the sacrifices our veterans made for our country, and we look forward to continuing this tradition each year, expanding our Field of Flags, and helping DAV spread awareness and raise money for our veterans. **Britney Wiener, Alexandria, Kentucky**

DAV Bowl

I am incredibly humbled and grateful to have been invited to help on-site planning for the 2026 DAV Bowl. Being behind the scenes with passionate, driven veterans—men and women who continue to push forward, serve and give back long after their uniforms are hung up—was truly inspiring. I'm especially grateful for the opportunity to spend additional time with veterans and their families I've known through my husband, who served alongside them. To the veterans and the retired NFL players who showed up, supported, and gave their time and presence, thank you. Your willingness to stand beside our veterans, amplify their mission and give back speaks volumes. Your support does not go unnoticed and is deeply appreciated. This experience was more than an event; it was an honor, a reminder and a privilege I'll carry with me.

Heidi Skaar, Marshall, Wisconsin

Editor's Note: For more on the DAV Bowl, see Page 16.

WRITE TO US Please send feedback to DAV Magazine, 860 Dolwick Drive, Erlanger, KY 41018, or via email to feedback@dav.org. We also welcome feedback on our social media pages. We regret we are unable to acknowledge every letter due to the volume received. Letters are subject to editing for clarity, style, accuracy, space and propriety. Letters involving claims are referred to DAV's Service Department.



Breaking barriers to fitness and recovery

New legislation would expand VA benefits to cover adaptive equipment

By Kevin C. Miller

Veterans who play sports and exercise regularly report higher self-esteem, lower depression and anxiety levels, and reduced stress. For those transitioning back to civilian life, physical activity is also a proven tool for reducing the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. Yet for veterans living with physical disabilities, the path to the gym or playing field often requires more than determination. It requires activity-specific prostheses and custom orthoses—equipment that can be prohibitively expensive.

Since World War II, the Department of Veterans Affairs has worked to improve prosthetics for service-disabled veterans, including those who have experienced limb loss. Over decades, the VA has pioneered advancements that have enhanced functionality and strengthened the connection between veterans and their prosthetic devices. Despite these technological leaps, a significant gap remains for veterans seeking to maintain an active lifestyle.

“Current law restricts the VA from providing recreational prostheses unless they are considered a ‘direct and active component’ of medical treatment,” said DAV National Legislative Director Jon Retzer. “As a result, prostheses that support exercise beyond a prescribed rehabilitation plan are typically not covered. This leaves many veterans sidelined once their initial clinical therapy concludes.”

The Veterans Supporting Prosthetics Opportunities and Recreational Therapy (SPORT) Act (H.R. 1971/S. 3138) was introduced in the House and Senate to close this gap. By expanding the definition of medical services to explicitly include adaptive prostheses and custom devices for sports and other recreational activities, the bill opens a gateway to independence, confidence and renewed possibilities. It recognizes that health is a lifelong pursuit—not a static goal.

“Our disabled veterans made tremendous sacrifices in defense of our nation, and they shouldn’t have to navigate VA red tape to get the medical equipment they need to lead active lifestyles,” said Sen. Jim Banks, the bill’s sponsor. “The Veterans SPORT Act would make sure their prostheses are always covered.”

The VA’s Prosthetics & Sensory Aids Service is the largest and most comprehensive provider of prosthetic devices and sensory aids in the world. This legislation would expand the VA medical benefits package to fully cover recreational prostheses on a permanent basis, ensuring the department remains the global leader in rehabilitation and veterans care.

“Every service-disabled veteran deserves the opportunity to lead an active, fulfilling life,” said DAV National Commander Coleman Nee. “For many, that independence depends on specialized adaptive equipment that goes beyond basic mobility. DAV is proud to support this legislation, as it honors our commitment to the total well-being of those who served.” ■



Stay Informed

To take action on the Veterans SPORT Act or other key veterans legislation, join DAV CAN (Commander’s Action Network) at davcan.org.

BEYOND THE BLAST

Afghanistan left him with lasting physical and psychological injuries. With DAV's help, he found a path forward.

By Matt Saintsing

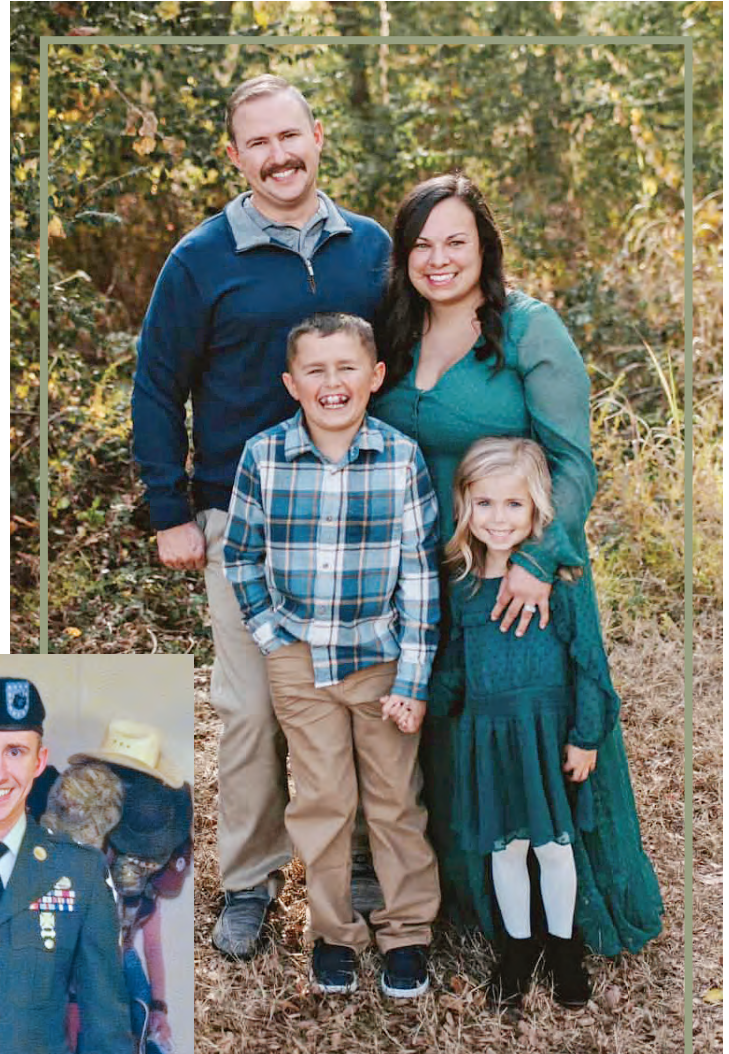
Richard Adams remembers precisely how far he was from the bomb's explosion in Afghanistan in 2013. Ten feet—far enough to survive the improvised explosive device (IED) blast but close enough to watch his friend, a fellow combat engineer, lose both legs.

"We got tourniquets on almost immediately," Adams said. "We were quick, and he made it."

It was seven days after Adams' 21st birthday. The blast threw him to the ground, knocking the wind out of him as he carried roughly 130 pounds of gear, including an M249 Squad Automatic Weapon. He spent two weeks recovering and being monitored for a brain injury since his eyes weren't dilating properly.

"I didn't know it at the time," Adams said, "but it jacked me up pretty good."

For him, coming home from war didn't mean leaving it behind. During his deployment, he was hit with two additional IEDs. That left him with lasting injuries, including traumatic brain injury (TBI) and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), conditions that often overlap, complicating access to care and benefits. But



Left: Richard Adams in his Class A uniform after returning from Afghanistan. He later confronted injuries that reshaped his life. **Above:** At home with his wife and children, Adams has found new purpose in everything he fought to rebuild.

with guidance from DAV, Adams secured the health care, compensation and educational benefits that gave him a path forward.

Adams experienced gaps in memory from before Afghanistan, including his childhood and high school years. He was also in significant physical pain, enough that he sought medical help while still on active duty.

Recognizing he needed help, Adams turned to Fred White, a DAV benefits advocate and senior associate national service officer in Muskogee, Oklahoma.

“He was a little lost and didn’t know how to navigate the VA system,” White said.

White submitted initial claims with the Department of Veterans Affairs for PTSD, TBI, migraines and tinnitus, as well as injuries to Adams’ back, left shoulder and hand. Those ailments also traced back to other brushes with death during his combat deployment.

Two months after arriving in Afghanistan, Adams was driving the lead MRAP (mine-resistant, ambush-protected) vehicle on a route-clearance mission when it struck an IED.

“It was raining, and we couldn’t see the ground well,” Adams said. “I drew the short stick.”

The blast—equivalent to 90 pounds of dynamite—blew off both front tires and filled the cab with smoke and dust. Five soldiers along with Adams stumbled out the back, all concussed.

“Pain was a full-body experience,” Adams said.

A third, less perilous IED later struck his Husky, a single-seat vehicle Adams was operating to detect roadside bombs.

As Adams pursued his VA claims, the familiar challenge of merging PTSD and TBI came into the picture.

“The VA often says they can’t distinguish between PTSD and TBI symptoms,” White said. “But in this case, we were able to show they were clearly different.”

The key was pushing for separate medical evaluations focused on each ailment.

“The cognitive issues from his TBI had nothing to do with the nightmares and anger associated with PTSD,” White said. “It came down to making the VA do its due diligence.”

“The compensation lifted a financial burden,” Adams said. “It gives me peace of mind knowing that if I can’t work, that support is there.”

Those claims were approved, and in 2016, Adams’ disability ratings were increased to better reflect his medical reality. Then, after the DAV-championed PACT Act—the largest expansion of veterans benefits in history—was signed into law in 2022, Adams received benefits for presumptive respiratory illnesses linked to burn pit exposure, including asthma.

“We were on a zero-waste base, so we burned everything,” Adams said. “My tent was less than 100 feet from the burn pit.”



White

Today, his service is a constant reminder. Nightmares are frequent. Loud noises—especially children screaming while playing—can pull him back overseas. Migraines from his TBI still strike several times a month. He must sleep completely in the dark or risk getting sick from sunlight exposure. Musculoskeletal pain makes it difficult to sit, walk or get out of bed.

“I can’t pick my son up, and he’s only 78 pounds,” Adams said. “When I was younger, that wouldn’t have been a problem.”

Adams also used educational benefits secured with DAV’s help to earn associate and bachelor’s degrees from the Oklahoma State University Institute of Technology. While crowded classrooms posed challenges, the benefits and support he received helped him adapt.

“It was life-changing,” said Christopher Colon, assistant supervisor of DAV’s Muskogee office, about the assistance Adams received. “There were a lot of moving parts, and DAV was there for all of them.” ■



With his wife by his side, Adams marks a hard-won milestone—proof that life after injury can still move forward.



Preparation meets opportunity

At the 2026 DAV Mid-Winter Conference, readiness turns disruption into decisive veterans advocacy

By M. Todd Hunter

A light but disruptive snow fell over Washington, D.C., on a Sunday evening in February, dusting monuments and muting the usual hum of the nation's capital. By morning, it had shuttered congressional offices, scrambled schedules and forced DAV members to rethink carefully laid-out plans.

It was an untimely inconvenience for the hundreds of advocates and supporters gathered at the 2026 DAV Mid-Winter Conference in Arlington, Virginia, but it also turned out to be a perfect encapsulation of the adage “success is where preparation and opportunity meet.”

In a week defined by regulatory whiplash and high-stakes testimony, DAV demonstrated exactly what readiness looks like in practice.

THE FIGHT BEFORE THE FIRST GAVEL

A defining moment of the week occurred before attendees even checked in to their hotel rooms.

Days before the conference, the Department of Veterans Affairs published an interim final rule that would have reduced disability compensation for certain disabled veterans who rely on medication to manage their service-connected conditions.

Within hours of the new rule's release, DAV was the first major veterans organization to issue a public statement challenging it. Others soon followed, and as word spread online, the veteran community became incensed, with thousands adding their voices via comments on the Federal Register website.

The result was swift and decisive.

Within 48 hours, the VA halted implementation of the rule, which has since been completely rescinded.

For many conference attendees, the reversal served as a powerful reminder that effective advocacy is rarely spontaneous. It is built on vigilance and expertise.

Preparation turned a regulatory threat into a victory for veterans.

A DIRECT CONVERSATION WITH VA LEADERSHIP

When the conference formally opened that Sunday morning, Feb. 22, VA Deputy Secretary Paul Lawrence addressed a ballroom filled with members and supporters who had witnessed DAV's advocacy in action.

He began by recognizing veterans' concerns with what had transpired the week before and said the experience showed the VA that it needed to improve its communication efforts with veterans and organizations like DAV. He said the department had no intention of ever talking about it again.

He also spoke of the importance of relationships and voiced his disappointment with those who argued that the VA was trying to reduce veterans benefits, emphasizing that both he and VA Secretary Doug Collins stated during their confirmation hearings that they would never do so.



Left to right: National Service Director Scott Hope, National Legislative Director Jon Retzer, Washington Headquarters Executive Director Jim Marszalek, National Adjutant Barry Jesinoski, National Commander Coleman Nee, National Headquarters Executive Director Cody VanBoxel, National Voluntary Services Director John Kleindienst, National Caregiver Support Program Director Ron Minter, and Auxiliary National Commander Melissa Pierce at the Joint Veterans' Affairs Committee hearing during the 2026 DAV Mid-Winter Conference.

"We value your partnership," Lawrence said. "We welcome where you disagree with us, in part because we know you are special partners and we agree on so much together. So please, don't speculate on our position about cutting benefits when our actions are so clear."

He went on to outline the VA's technological modernization efforts, structural reform, expansion of community care, and grassroots mobilization to combat homelessness and veteran suicide.

National Adjutant Barry Jesinoski then took to the lectern and affirmed with Lawrence that "we're never going to talk about [the rule] again." He also thanked Lawrence for acknowledging the need for better communication between DAV and the department.

"Grandstanding is not our gig. Advocating for those that we serve is," Jesinoski said to rousing applause from the crowd. "And when you have the ball, and we don't know where it's coming out, sometimes we're going to have to respond."

Jesinoski addressed the deputy secretary's comments from a foundation grounded in the lived realities of disabled veterans navigating the VA system and fighting for their earned benefits.

The moment embodied the purpose of the conference: The opportunity to speak candidly to senior leadership is valuable. Being prepared to do so with authority and precision is what makes it effective.

WHEN THE SNOW FELL

DAV staff choreographed this advocacy week in Washington carefully. Departments put their delegations in place. Attendees scheduled meetings with their Congress members weeks in advance. Leaders engrained their talking points.

Then the snow arrived.

The Sunday evening snowfall that swept across the region created travel challenges and prompted a cascade of cancellations. By Monday morning, many scheduled meetings between DAV members and their elected representatives had been called off as offices adjusted to the weather's impact.

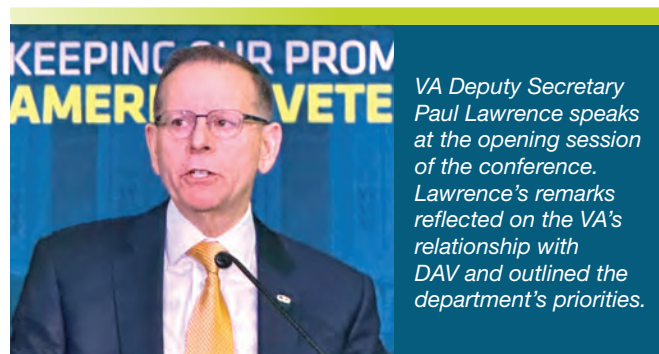
There was disappointment for members who had traveled from across the country to engage lawmakers face-to-face.

But preparation once again proved decisive. Teams pivoted quickly, rescheduling where possible, shifting to virtual formats and coordinating follow-up conversations for later in the week.

Tuesday introduced another obstacle. The State of the Union prompted closures at offices within the House of Representatives, further limiting in-person access on Capitol Hill.

Despite the disruptions, DAV members conducted more than 100 meetings with elected officials during the three-day conference. Advocates educated lawmakers and staff about the organization's critical policy goals and put human faces to the issues.

The schedule compressed. Windows narrowed. Yet the message didn't waver.



VA Deputy Secretary Paul Lawrence speaks at the opening session of the conference. Lawrence's remarks reflected on the VA's relationship with DAV and outlined the department's priorities.



National Commander Coleman Nee speaks to lawmakers at the Joint Veterans' Affairs Committee hearing on Feb. 24. Scan the code to view Nee's testimony.



COMMANDER'S CULMINATING TESTIMONY

The week culminated with DAV National Commander Coleman Nee delivering testimony before the Joint Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

Nee framed his remarks around a stark reality: The VA stands at a defining crossroads.

"On one path lies the dismantling, fragmentation and gradual erosion of a system that was built to serve veterans," he said during his prepared remarks. "On the other lies a principled effort to modernize, strengthen and safeguard the VA for future generations who will answer the call to serve."

He noted that the VA's mission is singular in American governance—to serve a population defined not by age, income or geography but by service and sacrifice.

"Private health care systems are not designed around military service," Nee added. "They don't specialize in combat trauma or polytrauma rehabilitation. They don't take into account the lifelong consequences of military toxic exposures. And they are not accountable to veterans in the same way a public institution is accountable to the people it serves."

Nee warned that the gradual dismantling of the VA runs counter to the benefits of preserving the department with seriousness and resolve.

"The choice before us is not between reform or stagnation. It is between responsibility or retreat," he said.

"History will judge which path we choose. What lies beyond it is not merely an institutional outcome but a statement of national character. Let us choose preservation. Let us choose reform. And above all, let us choose to keep the promise to those who have always kept faith with us."

Nee's testimony wasn't rhetorical flourish. It reflected disciplined policy analysis, consultation with members, and careful review of emerging legislative and regulatory proposals. The

opportunity to address lawmakers carried institutional weight. The preparation ensured that weight translated into influence.

LESSONS LEARNED

By the time the conference drew to a close, the snow had already melted. The State of the Union had wrapped. Schedules began to normalize.

But the lessons of the week remained.

Success didn't manifest as a single speech or meeting. It appeared in the rapid halting of a harmful rule. It showed in substantive dialogue with VA leadership. It endured through canceled appointments and compressed calendars. And it resonated in testimony that articulated a clear vision for the VA's future.

Preparation is often invisible. It happens in policy memos and in quiet conversations with staff. Opportunity, by contrast, is visible and often fleeting—a regulatory notice, a public hearing, a scheduled meeting on Capitol Hill.

The 2026 DAV Mid-Winter Conference demonstrated what happens when the two converge.

In an environment marked by complexity and uncertainty, veterans require disciplined, informed and agile advocates. They require organizations like DAV that are capable of not only reacting to change but also shaping it.

Snowstorms will come and go. Legislative calendars will shift. Regulatory surprises will surface.

But when preparation meets opportunity, even a week of disruptions can become a showcase of effective advocacy and a reaffirmation of a promise kept to America's veterans and their families, caregivers and survivors. ■



Stay Informed

To learn how you can support DAV's advocacy efforts, go to davcan.org.



Members of the DAV Department of Nevada met with Sen. Catherine Cortez Masto (back row, second from left) and Sen. Jacky Rosen (back row, fourth from left) in the Hart Senate Office Building.

From the NATIONAL MEMBERSHIP DIRECTOR LAMARR COUSER



Connecting in the digital age

DAV membership strengthens and propels our organization, with members and volunteers powering our advocacy and the myriad services we provide for ill and injured veterans.

To connect with veterans and their families in new, dynamic ways, DAV members and advocates are harnessing the power of Twitch to stream gameplay while educating viewers about DAV programs and services.

For many veterans, gaming offers more than entertainment. It can provide structure, camaraderie and a sense of belonging—things that are often difficult to replicate after leaving military service. Online communities built around shared interests can help bridge that gap.

Our Twitch channel offers a diverse lineup, including veterans news; critical legislative updates; and exclusive interviews with lawmakers, policymakers and subject matter experts.

During our community gaming streams, DAV members take the lead, playing their favorite games while connecting with a vast online audience, many of whom are new to DAV's mission.

Last fall, DAV announced a partnership with REGIMENT, the largest online military gaming community, whose mission is to unite veterans and service members through the power of gaming.

REGIMENT has built a community on Discord, an online communication tool that includes channels specific to the different military branches; channels for resume assistance; and a new channel, VA Help, where veterans can get help with their disability claims.

The channels allow veterans from all over the world to talk about their interests, play video games together and build a community unlike any other.

Through this partnership, veterans and their families have access to holistic support, combining REGIMENT's focus on mental health and social connection through gaming with DAV's critical benefits assistance and advocacy.

We have also partnered with REGIMENT to give one lucky veteran the chance to win a \$5,000 gaming PC. When veterans sign up, connect their social media accounts and complete tasks, they earn entries into the raffle. Keep an eye on our social media channels for announcements about the upcoming giveaway.

Our goal is simple: Ensure no veteran is left behind in the digital age. Whether veterans connect with DAV through a service office, a local chapter or an online gaming community, what matters most is that they know support is available and that they remain part of a strong and enduring veteran community.

Want to engage with an online community of like-minded veterans? Learn more about DAV gaming and how to become a livestreamer for DAV at dav.org/gaming or scan the QR code. ■





2026-2027

Candidates for National Office

The following information is intended to inform membership about the announced candidates for national office. It doesn't constitute an official endorsement of approval by DAV National Headquarters of any candidate to the exclusion of others who may stand for election. DAV members may announce their candidacy at any time, up to and including the time of election at the 2026 DAV and Auxiliary National Convention, which will be held Aug. 1–4 in Orlando, Florida.



John Donovan

John Donovan, a service-connected disabled Navy veteran and DAV life member of Chapter 10 in Conway, Arkansas, currently serves as DAV's national senior vice commander. He served as the National Executive Committee representative of

District 21 for both Arkansas and Oklahoma from 2019 to 2021 and served on the board of directors during the same period. He also serves as adjutant of the Department of Arkansas.

Donovan was honorably discharged from the Navy

in 2004, after serving for 24 years. He went on to earn his bachelor's degree in sociology and a master's degree in organizational management with a minor in organizational leadership.

During his time with DAV, Donovan has actively supported and volunteered for veterans, including yard cleanups and ramp construction for wheelchair access. Donovan works with Arkansas' national service officers at information seminars and with chapters conducting compensation claims events across the state to raise awareness of DAV programs. In November 2025, he was inducted into the Arkansas Military Veterans Hall of Fame.

Donovan is seeking election to higher national office.





James Procunier

James Procunier is a service-connected disabled Navy and Navy Reserve veteran who served from 1985 to 2013 and currently serves as DAV's national first junior vice commander. During his enlistment, Procunier served in a number of billets as

a hospital corpsman, retiring as a chief petty officer. As a civilian contractor, he served as a project officer for the Navy MRAP (Mine Resistant-Ambush Protected) vehicle program, which saved untold lives in Iraq and Afghanistan, and on other defense-related management programs. Additionally, Procunier served 34 years in law enforcement in Florida and Michigan and is a former firefighter and paramedic.

Procunier is a life member of Chapter 16 in Jacksonville, North Carolina. He previously served as a trustee for a DAV department and chapter. He has served in nearly every capacity at the state level in DAV, including commander of the Department of Virginia. For his service with Chapter 10 in Fairfax, Virginia, he was named the chapter's Volunteer of the Year before being honored with the 2016 John Maki Distinguished Service Award. In 2017, he was recognized as the Department of Virginia Disabled American Veteran of the Year. On the national level, Procunier served for seven years on the National Interim Legislation Committee and five years on the Convention Committee for Legislation and Veterans Rights, with two years as the chair. He also served on the board of directors of the National Service Foundation.

Procunier is seeking election to higher national office.



Glenn E. Hohman

Glenn E. Hohman, a service-connected disabled veteran who served in the Army from 1992 to 2013 with combat deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan, is a life member of Chapter 14 in Sierra Vista, Arizona. He currently serves

as DAV's national second junior vice commander; Department of Arizona judge advocate and Benefits Protection Team leader; and treasurer and driver for Chapter 14. Additionally, Hohman serves as vice chair

of Unified Arizona Veterans and on U.S. Sen. Mark Kelly's Veteran Advisory Committee.

Hohman has earned a Bachelor of Applied Science in intelligence operations and a Master of Business Administration in management from Wayland Baptist University, Texas. He previously served as National Executive Committee 18th District representative, National Service Foundation director, National Interim Legislation and National Interim Constitution and Bylaws committee member. Hohman has also served in various other roles at the chapter and department level.

Hohman is seeking election to higher national office.



Brenda Reed

Brenda Reed is a service-connected disabled veteran who served in the Army from 1978 to 1983 and is a life member of Chapter 4 in New Port Richey, Florida. She currently serves as DAV's national third junior vice commander and has been

active at both the chapter and department levels, serving in nearly every capacity at those levels since becoming a DAV life member in 1992. She is the immediate past department commander of Florida and currently serves

as the judge advocate of Chapter 4.

Reed has contributed to DAV in many ways, including as a dedicated volunteer. She has also participated in all three DAV women veterans reports, helped establish and serve on the Interim Women Veterans Committee, and assisted the national legislative staff with issues affecting women's health and prosthetics.

She earned an associate degree in nursing from the University of Alabama at Birmingham Walker College and a Bachelor of Science in nursing at the University of Alabama in Huntsville.

Reed is seeking election to higher national office.



Adam Greathouse

Adam Greathouse is a service-connected disabled Army veteran who has served in nearly every position at the chapter and department levels. He currently serves as DAV's national fourth junior vice commander; Department of West Virginia

adjutant; and commander of Chapter 2 in Huntington, West Virginia.

Greathouse enlisted in 1999 and deployed to Kosovo in 2001. During that deployment, he inhaled an unknown chemical substance, which severely damaged his

lungs, causing him to fall into a two-month coma and sustain a traumatic brain injury. Following an arduous recovery at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, he was medically retired.

A compassionate volunteer, Greathouse has donated thousands of hours at his local Department of Veterans Affairs medical center. He also serves as a spokesman and public service announcement ambassador for DAV and the National Veterans Summer Sports Clinic. He was the recipient of the DAV Freedom Award at the 2017 National Disabled Veterans Winter Sports Clinic and was named the 2020 Disabled American Veteran of the Year.

Greathouse is seeking election to higher national office.



Jerry Estes

Jerry Estes, a service-connected disabled Air Force veteran, is a life member of Chapter 14 in Layton, Utah, where he has served in nearly all positions, including DAV Department of Utah commander. He is currently the department's treasurer and

Benefits Protection Team leader. Estes served on the National Executive Committee from 2023 to 2025 for District 17 and as treasurer on the board of directors for a term.

Estes served as an Air Reserve technician from 1980

to 2010, with combat deployments to Saudi Arabia; two tours in Kuwait in support of the Gulf War; four tours to Incirlik, Turkey, in support of Operation Provide Comfort; and two tours in Iraq.

Estes received the Outstanding Performance in Advocacy award as the Benefit Protection Team leader for Division V from 2021 to 2022, and Department of Utah awards for Disabled American Veteran of the Year in 2020 and 2025, Volunteer of the Year in 2023, Service Officer of the Year in 2019 and 2022, and Distinguished Service Award in 2019 and 2021. He was also appointed to Utah's World War II Memorial Commission in 2019.

Estes is seeking election to national office.



Denice T. Williams

Denice T. Williams, a service-connected disabled Marine veteran, is a life member of DAV Chapter 22 in Portsmouth, Virginia, where she has served as a chapter commander. She has also served as DAV Department of Virginia commander, senior

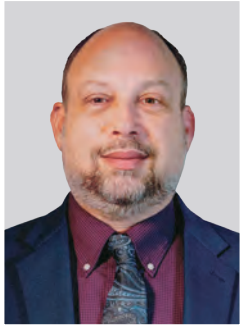
vice commander, first junior vice commander and inspector. She has also served on the board of directors of the DAV Charitable Service Trust since 2015.

Williams joined the Marine Corps in 1976 and served

nearly 30 years before retiring at the rank of lieutenant colonel in 2005.

Williams received her master's degree in international studies from Old Dominion University. Additionally, she earned a certificate of completion in military strategy and policy from the Naval War College. She is an advocate for women veterans by serving in the Women Marines Association and the Women in Military Service for America Memorial Foundation. In addition, she is a life member of the National Naval Officers Association and the Montford Point Marines Association.

Williams is seeking election to national office.



Brian Wilner

Brian Wilner, a service-connected disabled Army veteran, is a DAV life member of Chapter 18 in Augusta, Georgia, and Chapter 44 in North Augusta, South Carolina, where he currently serves as adjutant. He has served in nearly every capacity at the state level in both Georgia and South Carolina. He was named Chapter Service Officer of the Year for the Department of Georgia for five years in a row and Department of South Carolina Officer of the Year in 2017 and 2022.

Wilner served as a Department of South Carolina Benefits Protection Team leader for six years and received

the Division II Outstanding Performance in Advocacy award for 2019–2020 and 2020–2021. He also received the Presidential Lifetime Achievement Award in 2024 for his advocacy on behalf of veterans and their families. He was elected and served as the District 9 National Executive Committee representative from 2012 to 2013.

Wilner is a past president of the DAV Commanders and Adjutants Association. He has also served as vice president and chaplain and on the executive committee. Additionally, Wilner has been a judge advocate for the Aiken County Veterans Council since 2015 and has served as the president of the South Carolina Veterans Advisory Council since 2020.

Wilner is seeking election to national office.



Michael Dobmeier | for National Judge Advocate

Michael Dobmeier has served as national judge advocate, advising the National Executive Committee (NEC) and board of directors, since 2002. He served as DAV national commander in 1999 and as the 14th District NEC representative in 1994.

Dobmeier enlisted in the Navy in 1969 after graduating from high school. He trained as an engineman; attended the Naval Submarine School in New London, Connecticut;

and completed Navy Dive School in San Diego. In 1972, Dobmeier suffered severe burns on more than 30% of his body after an oil heater exploded aboard the submarine USS Trigger. He was discharged later that year and became a life member of Chapter 2 in Grand Forks, North Dakota. He has since been appointed or elected to nearly every chapter and department office and position and was named the 1985 DAV Outstanding Member of the Department of North Dakota.

Dobmeier is seeking election to another term as national judge advocate.



Debra Varner Dancer | for National Chaplain

Debra Varner Dancer, a service-connected disabled Army veteran, currently serves as DAV's national chaplain. She has been a life member of Chapter 4 in Birmingham, Alabama, since 2013.

Dancer joined the Army in 1972 and served as a medic. After her military service, she earned bachelor's degrees in business administration from Southern Business College and in theology from Lomax Hannon Bible College in Alabama.

After college, she began working for the University of Alabama at Birmingham Hospital, where she has

enjoyed a career as a women's service coordinator. She has continued her service there as a resource support specialist in the Veterans Service/Student Affairs office, where she's assisted more than 3,700 veterans and family members requiring assistance with education benefits.

She also serves as a hospital service coordinator for the Birmingham Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center, where she helps veterans and their families find resources and learn about earned benefits.

Dancer has more than 30 years of experience in pastoral ministry and support, including serving as a chaplain for the DAV Department of Alabama.

Dancer is seeking election to another term as national chaplain.

MORE than a GAME



Life-changing DAV Bowl brings veterans and athletes together to rediscover purpose, resilience and camaraderie

By Rob Lewis

When Kelly Smith played football in 2015 for the first time since her injury, the experience was transformative.

It was a small moment on a sideline in Tampa, Florida, when someone threw her a ball. But for the medically retired corpsman, who said she lost her left arm as a result of a combat injury in Iraq in 2007, it was the beginning of finding herself again.

"I caught a football and ran a little bit," Smith said. "I smiled. My husband hadn't seen me smile in years."

"My life changed from catching that football right then and there."

A decade after the catch that began her transformation away from a "very angry" veteran with no purpose, Smith returned to the resurrected version of that flag football game when she joined nearly 40 of her fellow disabled veterans for the 2026 Disabled American Veterans Bowl, which was held just south of San Francisco and coincided with the Super Bowl.

The game featured a squad of veterans—Team Heroes—squaring off against NFL veterans and influencers—Team Legends—and was held to highlight the similar challenges veterans and professional athletes face, including mental health challenges and loss of purpose once the uniform is put away forever.

The DAV Bowl was presented in partnership with Athletes for Care (A4C),

which advocates for the health and wellness of athletes. A4C co-founder and CEO Robert Gallery, a former Oakland Raiders and University of Iowa star, said the competition on the field was intense but friendly.

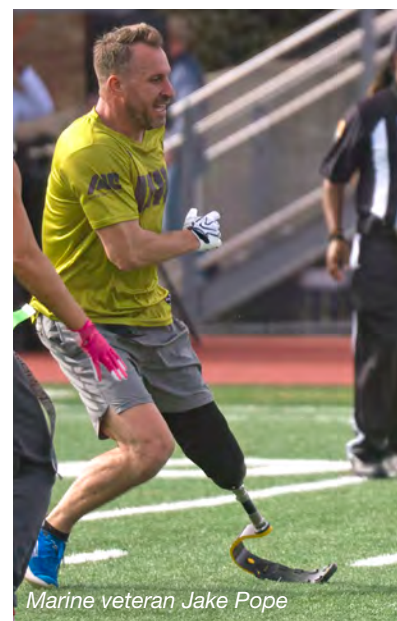
"The two groups have a ton of mutual respect for each other. Our ideals are the same. The same mindset. The same values," Gallery said. "It's about being resilient and being leaders and teaching other people to talk about [our struggles]."

B.J. Ganem, a combat-disabled Marine veteran and amputee, has been organizing and participating in the game since 2012. He couldn't contain his excitement and gratitude for the participants and DAV for bringing the community associated with the game back for the first time since the COVID-19 pandemic halted the event.

"This is all of us celebrating what we have left in the tank and that we are all worthwhile," said Ganem, an alum of DAV Patriot Boot Camp for entrepreneurs whose venture, Ganem Consulting, helped facilitate this year's DAV Bowl. "We can have some fun as we play America's game together, with meaning."

"This was possible because we have DAV behind us."

DAV National Adjutant Barry Jesinoski said the support from Ganem and many others helped bring attention and new avenues of support to the organization around Championship Week and the Super Bowl.



Marine veteran Jake Pope



(Continued on Page 18)

“

DAV creates spaces where veterans feel seen, supported and connected, and that impact was undeniable on the field.”

—Samantha Juan



Army veteran CeCe Mazyck



Army veteran Samantha Juan



Army veteran Robbie Gaupp and Navy veteran Kelly Smith



Former Green Bay Packers running back Ahman Green



The Heroes huddle



Left: Former NFL star Robert Gallery didn't just play for the Legends team; his charity, Athletes for Care, partnered with DAV to bring the game back after a hiatus. **Above:** Mariah Lopez, a member of the women athletics group Grrridiron Girls, evades an opponent.

"The DAV Bowl was far more than a game. It's a powerful reminder of who our veterans are and what they represent," Jesinoski said. "During one of the biggest weeks in sports, we had the opportunity to elevate their stories, their resilience and their continued commitment to one another. This event wasn't just memorable; it reinforces that the bonds forged in service and sports don't end when the uniform comes off."

In addition to Gallery, former Green Bay Packers running back Ahman Green; Army veteran and "Dancing With the Stars" contestant Noah Galloway; former Army Green Beret, NFL veteran, and founder and CEO of Merging Vets & Players Nate Boyer; Fox Sports analyst and former NFL player Spencer Tillman; former NFL player Chris Draft; and other well-known players participated in or supported the bowl.

Green said that the competition was fun, but it was the stories of the veterans that brought him out to the game.

"That's why I come out here. Just to hear their stories," he said. "When they tell me the story about how their injury happened, knowing that it was a lot to get through it and to be here and back on the field, running around and giving 110% ... it's just fantastic."

Former NFL Vice President of Officiating Mike Pereira, whose charity, Battlefields to Ballfields, helps veterans become referees, provided the crew. Dave DesRochers, an adviser to the NFL Players Association and founder and CEO of the 1st & Goal Project, a charity that helps veterans and others transition and grow, played and supported the effort. Sports media personality Kenny Mayne, founder of Run Freely, a charity that helps make active lifestyles accessible to veterans, played snap

quarterback. Dr. Jen Welter, the first woman to coach in the NFL, played after hosting a flag football camp for her charity, Grrridiron Girls.

For Army veteran Samantha Juan, the DAV Bowl provided her with the opportunity to play football for the first time. Only the rules, not physicality, were an issue for Juan, who served in the elite, all-female Cultural Support Teams in Afghanistan.

"The DAV Bowl was more than a game. It was a visible reminder that service doesn't end when the uniform comes off," Juan said. "DAV creates spaces where veterans feel seen,

supported and connected, and that impact was undeniable on the field."

Juan's fellow combat veteran and athlete, Smith, agreed.

"Bringing this game back and doing what DAV is doing, it changes lives," Smith said. "I know it sounds cliché, but I don't know where I would be without it. I probably wouldn't be married. I probably wouldn't have a relationship with my children and now my grandchild.

"Because I caught a football at one of these games."

And what about the football that changed her life?

"I still have that football to this day," she said. "I refuse to give it up." ■



After losing an arm and a leg in a blast during the Iraq War, Noah Galloway refused to let his injuries define him, rebuilding his strength through relentless training and resilience. His determination embodied the spirit of the DAV Bowl. Learn more about Galloway and his recent plant medicine journey on Page 22.

On the cusp

We know more about moral injury than ever. What we do next could save veterans' lives.

By Elizabeth DePompei

For most of her 16 years with the New Mexico Army National Guard, retired Master Sgt. Crystal Romero loved with her job and the opportunities that came with it. She worked in logistics, public affairs, human resources and homeland security. She supported relief efforts for three major hurricanes and the space shuttle Columbia disaster.

She loved the people she worked alongside and felt like a respected part of a team.

"It was just a great experience," Romero said, "until it wasn't."

Romero was working as a victim advocate and suicide prevention coordinator. It was meaningful work she believed in. So when she saw a counterpart neglecting responsibilities in ways that put vulnerable service members at risk, she reported it to her supervisor. The supervisor said the person in question was related to someone high up.

"I am not going to bite the hand that feeds me," Romero said she was told.

Not long after she filed a formal complaint, Romero said, her support staff was reassigned, leaving her isolated. Colleagues told her she'd "poked the bear" and ruined her career. When Romero sought mental health support, she said her personal information was circulated around the office. It felt like retaliation.

"It was humiliating," Romero said. "Everything that I believed in was betrayed, and it just killed a big part of me."

(Continued on next page)



Romero



“

If you want to really affect suicide prevention, you’ve got to get into the arena that I think matters the most, which is moral health.

”

— Dr. Carter Check

Romero was ultimately taken off active duty and separated for post-traumatic stress disorder due to a hostile work environment. It was years before she learned about the real wound she was living with: moral injury.

Inspired by Homer’s *Iliad*, a psychiatrist first coined the term “moral injury” in 1994 as a way to describe what Vietnam veterans experienced during combat. It’s now generally understood as the result of witnessing, experiencing or perpetrating something that violates a person’s sense of right and wrong. When that violation negatively affects how a person views themselves or the world and impairs how they function, it can be considered a moral injury.

In a 2025 study, nearly 6% of more than 3,000 veterans surveyed screened positive for moral injury. Comparatively, the overall lifetime prevalence of PTSD among veterans is 7%, with the rate for post-9/11 veterans reaching nearly 30%, according to the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Moral injury is often mistaken for PTSD. Experts agree there’s overlap, but PTSD diagnosis and treatment don’t necessarily account for an injury to someone’s values and identity, leaving the resulting shame, grief and apathy unaddressed. When moral injury goes unidentified or isn’t uniquely addressed, the results can be devastating.

‘THE WRONG INJURY’

In the wake of losing the career she loved, Romero said she became “extremely suicidal.”

Combat veteran and retired Army Sgt. Eric Donoho found himself in a similar position but for very different reasons.

Donoho lost 17 friends in combat and survived two improvised explosive devices. But his first experience with moral injury came after he landed in Kuwait and was informed that his wife, who was seven months pregnant, had miscarried their son, David. Donoho returned home

for the funeral and was told he could take more time with his family. Donoho decided to go back to war instead.

“I can still remember looking back up the ramp as I was walking down to the plane in Anchorage and seeing her at the gate crying,” Donoho said. “And I didn’t have to put her through that.”

Donoho was medically retired in 2009. By 2015, his marriage was in bad shape. He had been undergoing PTSD treatment in an attempt “to get back to who I was before war,” but by the end of that year, Donoho attempted suicide.

“I was treating the wrong injury,” Donoho said.

He said his PTSD diagnosis and treatment didn’t account for the fact that he didn’t believe he was a good person worthy of good things.

“How can you use the tools that are given to you for PTSD when you’re not even strong enough some days to get out of bed, because you don’t feel like you deserve to live?” he asked.



Donoho



According to data from the VA, 6,398 veterans died by suicide in 2023. Limited research shows that moral injury is an independent risk factor for suicide, with one study reporting that, of the surveyed veterans, health care workers and first responders who screened positive for moral injury, over 60% reported suicidal ideation and over 40% said they had attempted suicide in their lifetime.

“If you want to really affect suicide prevention,” said moral injury expert Dr. Carter Check, “you’ve got to get into the arena that I think matters the most, which is moral health.”

Check is a chaplain and suicide prevention specialist with the VA Eastern Oklahoma Health Care System. His unique role is indicative of the kind of approach veterans and experts say is needed to heal from moral injury. That’s because, Check said, the experience of moral injury is “super subjective,” so healing will look a bit different for everyone.

ALL HANDS ON DECK

Romero learned about moral injury and began to heal after attending Save A Warrior, a DAV partner program that hosts 72-hour retreats using a holistic approach to suicide prevention. She also found help through psychedelics and psychotherapy.

For retired Army Sgt. 1st Class Constance Cotton, a Gulf War veteran, healing comes from breaking her silence. Her moral injury began with recruiters sexually harassing her. As a Black service member, she also witnessed and experienced racism. Through it all, she felt silenced and betrayed by leaders who were supposed to uphold values like respect, honor and integrity.

Cotton learned about moral injury during a three-day workshop hosted by a chaplain at the Philadelphia VA.

“It’s just amazing how, when you can name what happened in a safe space and with the right language, how much healing that brings to people,” she said.

Cotton is now part of the Philadelphia VA’s moral injury leadership group and dedicates much of her advocacy to giving others a safe place to talk about moral injury.

Donoho said two things have been essential for him: faith and service. His faith is rooted in God, but Donoho said that doesn’t have to be the case for everyone. Meanwhile, service, he said, gets veterans out of their heads and reprograms negative narratives

about themselves. That method tracks with what experts have found.

“We need to help people correct the harm that’s done to them or the harm that they’ve done to others by being different in the world,” said Dr. Brett Litz, a professor of psychiatry at the Boston University School of Medicine and a researcher who has been instrumental in shaping how we understand moral injury.

Litz said that for someone who has harmed others and is grappling with guilt or shame, healing can include reestablishing their value in their community, like by serving others. For someone who has been victimized by or witnessed harm, making room for others to show their goodness can help change their negative beliefs about humanity.

While a VA flyer describes moral injury interventions as being “in their infancy,” significantly more is understood than when the term was first coined in 1994. The challenge, Litz said, is getting providers and the wider community on the same page about how to define, assess and treat moral injury. The same thing was true of PTSD in the 1970s and ’80s.

“Right now, we’re at the cusp,” Litz said, adding that there’s plenty of reason to be hopeful.

Litz noted that the VA has good tools to assess moral injury and that clinicians can use existing trauma-informed care to help veterans. If they incorporate what’s known about moral injury, “they can improve the lives of veterans, right now,” Litz said.

VA chaplains also provide moral-injury resources, and Check noted that the care doesn’t depend on religious beliefs. Having care that includes practitioners from various backgrounds is “nonnegotiable,” he added.

“We need all disciplines on deck to solve the problem,” Check said. ■



Litz



Cotton



Learn More Online

Scan the code to learn more about moral injury and to find resources.



The mind, REOPENED

An Army veteran travels to Mexico for ibogaine therapy—and finds a different kind of calm

By Matt Saintsing

On a quiet morning in Cancún, Mexico, with monitors tracing the rhythm of his heart, Noah Galloway leaned back and prepared to surrender what had been crucial to his survival—control.

Galloway had come a long way since he graced the cover of Men's Health magazine and was a finalist on ABC's "Dancing With the Stars" in 2014. He enlisted in the Army after 9/11 and deployed twice with the 101st Airborne Division. In 2005, during his second tour in Iraq, an explosion cost him his left arm and leg. He returned home determined to push forward—physically, publicly, relentlessly.

He built a life on strength, showcasing resilience in public speaking. However, the foundation holding everything was built on silence.

"I bottled it all up," he said. "Not just the injury. Everything."

For years, he lived in extremes, either driven and outward-facing or withdrawn and shut down. Emotions, when they surfaced, often came out as anger. Sadness stayed buried. His nervous system never fully powered down.

"I was always in fight or flight," he said.

Then, four years ago, his wife introduced him to psilocybin, a psychedelic used in clinical settings to treat depression, anxiety and addiction. The experience surprised him. Emotions he'd long suppressed began to surface. He cried. He reflected. He felt.

"That was the first crack in the armor," said Galloway.

Over time, he tried several other therapies. Eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR). Neurofeedback. Ayahuasca in Peru through the Heroic

Hearts Project. Later, 5-MeO-DMT, a powerful, short-acting medicine.

Each step, he said, built on the last.

But ibogaine felt different.

Derived from a West African shrub, ibogaine remains illegal in the United States and carries known cardiac risks. Treatment is often sought abroad under medical supervision. Galloway traveled to a clinic in Cancún,

"Psychedelics can increase metacognitive awareness. People begin to see how earlier experiences shaped their responses. They often move from self-criticism to self-understanding."

—Noah Galloway

where patients undergo medical screening and are monitored continuously during the process.

Unlike ayahuasca, which Galloway experienced ceremonially in Peru, ibogaine was administered with doctors and nurses present. He was connected to an electrocardiograph. An IV line was placed as a precaution.

"Ibogaine can affect your heart," he said. "They monitor everything."

The medicine also affects people in unique ways. For Galloway, the experience itself was less visual than he expected. No fireworks. No dramatic emotional purge.

"It removes the noise," he said. "It resets your nervous system."

Galloway is part of a mounting number of veterans seeking relief outside traditional channels as research into psychedelic-assisted therapies gains national attention.

Psilocybin, MDMA and ibogaine are some of the psychedelic compounds currently in clinical trials.

Earlier studies—and mounting anecdotal reports—suggest they may help address treatment-resistant post-traumatic stress disorder, depression and moral injury. As lawmakers debate access and researchers push for clinical clarity, veterans are once again at the forefront of a conversation that could reshape mental health care.

For Galloway, the most meaningful changes weren't what he saw in the moment but what followed.

Researchers studying psychedelic-assisted therapy say that pattern isn't unusual.

"What we're finding," said Brandon Weiss, a researcher in psychedelic science at Johns Hopkins University, "is that certain features of the acute experience—particularly emotional breakthrough and shifts in self-understanding—are associated with longer-term symptom improvement."

Weiss points to three recurring elements in studies of psilocybin and related compounds: emotional processing of traumatic material; the ability to observe one's own thought patterns; and experiences often described as unity, meaning or profound perspective shifts.

"These experiences can allow people to examine long-held beliefs about themselves," Weiss said, "especially beliefs rooted in shame or early life experiences."

He cautions that the drug alone isn't the intervention.

"Preparation and post-session support are critical," he said. "The psychedelic can open things up. The support helps people integrate what they've seen."

During his experience, Galloway said he saw humanity as part of a single tree, its branches reaching

outward and its leaves representing people pulling from the same source. Some branches fought one another, unaware they were fed by the same trunk.

The image lingered with him, a reminder of how deeply connected and interdependent humans are.

He also experienced moments of distance, observing Earth from above and feeling disconnected from ego and performance. At one point, he describes floating alone in space—not afraid, not lonely but simply present.

"For someone with anxiety and PTSD, being alone with your thoughts is usually terrifying," he said. "But I was OK."

Friends noticed he seemed calmer. Less reactive. More grounded.

Before, small stressors could trigger outsized reactions followed by regret. Now, he finds space between stimulus and response.

While traveling recently, he called his teenage daughter about a situation that could have escalated.

"She was immediately defensive," he said. "And I told her, 'You're not in trouble. We'll talk about it later.'"

That pause—that regulation—felt new.

"When you're calm, you get more accomplished," he said.

Like many veterans, Galloway once believed his struggles stemmed primarily from combat.

But psychedelic work challenged that assumption.

Stress or moral injuries suffered in service can aggravate and elevate preexisting conditions.

"We have so much from childhood that shapes how we respond to trauma," Galloway said.

(Continued on next page)

Left: Galloway while deployed with the 101st Airborne Division. He was later seriously injured by an enemy bomb.

Center: In Mexico, heart monitors are placed on his chest before treatment.

Right: Under medical supervision, Galloway undergoes ibogaine treatment.



Weiss said research increasingly supports that observation.

“Psychedelics can increase metacognitive awareness,” he said. “People begin to see how earlier experiences shaped their responses. They often move from self-criticism to self-understanding.”

In some cases, that shift reduces the secondary suffering layered on top of trauma—shame about having symptoms or anger at oneself for reacting a certain way.

“It doesn’t erase what happened,” Weiss said, “but it can change the relationship someone has to it.”

As interest in psychedelic-assisted therapy grows, some experts urge careful guardrails alongside optimism.

“These remain investigational interventions,” said Dr. Joseph Fins, chief of the Division of Medical Ethics at Weill Cornell Medicine. “They are not yet established treatments. That distinction matters.”

Fins, whose work focuses on neuroethics and emerging brain-based interventions, said psychedelics should be delivered within structured clinical frameworks with rigorous screening, medical oversight and long-term follow-up.

“You can’t simply open someone up and send them home,” he said. “The biological effects may be powerful, but without psychological support and continuity of care, you risk doing only half the work or potentially exposing someone to harm.”

For veterans in particular, he emphasizes that care must account for both individual trauma and group identity.

“Service members are shaped by unit cohesion and solidarity,” Fins said. “Treatment shouldn’t isolate them from that reality. Individual therapy is important but so is group connection—realizing your experience, while deeply personal, is not uniquely yours.”

He also raises a practical concern: What happens if these interventions prove successful?

“We often focus on whether something works,” Fins said. “But we also have to ask: If it works for you, then what? Who supports you long term? Once we begin, we have an obligation to finish.”

For veterans navigating hope alongside uncertainty, that balance—innovation paired with infrastructure—may be just as important as the medicine itself.

Ibogaine, like most psychedelic compounds, is still being studied. The Food and Drug Administration hasn’t approved it for any conditions. Access is limited. Risks exist, and patients must be carefully screened.

“We still don’t know long-term durability across populations,” Weiss said. “And we don’t have large-scale data comparing different integration models.”

He emphasizes that screening, monitoring and follow-up are essential, particularly in populations vulnerable to depression or suicidal ideation.

For Galloway, the experience was about enhancing rather than bypassing therapy.

“I used to think therapy didn’t work,” he said. “Now I realize it works when you’re willing to work.”

He continues to attend sessions. He treats ibogaine not as a cure but as an opportunity.

“My nervous system feels reset,” he said. “Now it’s on me to build new habits.”

Galloway believes veterans are uniquely positioned to shape how the country views emerging mental health treatments.

“I’ve said before, veterans are going to lead the way in mental health,” he said. “Because people can see the change.”

He has seen skepticism soften when lawmakers and community members hear firsthand accounts. He points to public figures who shifted their stance after meeting veterans reporting improvement.

But he’s careful not to oversell.

“Any therapy only does so much,” he said. “The work is in us.”

For a man who once measured strength by how much he could suppress, that may be the most profound change of all.

He no longer feels compelled to perform resilience. He wants something simpler now.

“I just want to live my best life,” he said.

And for the first time in decades, he said that life feels quiet enough to build. ■



Galloway at home with his family. His recovery continues, and family support is central to the process.

DAV and VFW release *Veterans Independent Budget*

Report urges Congress and administration to move beyond short-term fixes

By Kevin C. Miller

For nearly 40 years, DAV and the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) have partnered to assess the financial resources the Department of Veterans Affairs needs to serve veterans. The *Veterans Independent Budget* for fiscal year 2027 arrives as the VA faces rising demand for care and benefits following years of budgetary unpredictability.

These recommendations are based solely on the documented needs of veterans and their families, caregivers and survivors.

“The *Veterans Independent Budget* is our opportunity to put a human face on the issues that determine the future of veterans health care and benefits,” said DAV Washington Headquarters Executive Director Jim Marszalek. “We are dedicated to making tangible differences in the lives of America’s veterans and their families by ensuring the VA has the right resources to meet their evolving needs.”

Addressing the capacity gap

The budget recommends \$223.3 billion for FY 2027 to address the full range of services and benefits veterans have earned. This funding aims to address a backlog of health care needs that were delayed or unavailable in previous years.

While enrollment is rising, the number of unique veteran users and their reliance on the VA is growing even faster, driven by PACT Act expansions and an aging veteran population.

The VA lacks the capacity to meet this demand due to decades of underinvestment in infrastructure, technology and staffing. Therefore, the organizations call for:

- **\$116.4 billion** for Medical Services to expand direct care and fill approximately 40,000 clinical vacancies
- **\$15.8 billion** for Medical Facilities to address a massive backlog of unfunded maintenance projects
- **\$1.45 billion** for Medical and Prosthetic Research to maintain the VA’s leadership in medical innovation



Critical program expansions

Several targeted investments are necessary to modernize the veteran experience, including \$2.5 billion for long-term services and supports for aging veterans and \$675 million for comprehensive dental care for all disabled veterans. It also recommends \$100 million for women veterans health care to support a population that now exceeds 1 million enrollees.

Protecting veterans benefits

The Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) remains under significant pressure from more than 1 million PACT Act-related claims. The budget recommends \$6.2 billion for VBA to continue reducing the claims backlog. Notably, the report calls for \$7 million to help the VA’s Office of General Counsel combat “claims sharks”—unaccredited agents who illegally charge veterans for assistance.

DAV remains committed to ensuring the VA is the primary provider and coordinator of care for our nation’s heroes. It’s imperative that Congress and the administration move beyond short-term fixes and begin making the long-term investments veterans have earned.

“With a united, engaged voice, we will continue to protect veterans benefits and fight to ensure the promise is kept,” said DAV National Legislative Director Jon Retzer. “Now is the time for every veteran to speak up and demand that Congress fully fund these critical priorities to secure the care our community has earned.” ■



Learn More Online

The *Veterans Independent Budget* is available at dav.org/about-dav/legislation/veterans-independent-budget.





After the military, this veteran's sense of purpose hit 'rock bottom.' Now, she finds meaning by helping others online.

By Liz Stetler

While deployed in Afghanistan, DAV life member Melissa Allen used her free time to set up a shared network for her unit's temporary living quarters so the soldiers could play on their Xboxes together.

In her small unit, connection was mission-critical. Allen handled everything electronic—radios, satellites and any other systems that kept soldiers linked and safe.

"Military service was definitely a highlight of my life," she said.

Little did she know that her skills and love for gaming would become a lifeline for her and others after military service.

Allen enlisted in 2007. After raising her three kids, running a daycare and owning a costume business, she could finally pursue her lifelong dream of joining the Army.

"I left for basic training at 32 years old," Allen said. "The wait was definitely worth it."

To Allen, serving in the military felt like destiny.

"Every generation in my family has served," she said. "After all of those generations, it becomes part of you. It was in my blood."

She became a signal systems repair specialist in the Nebraska Army National Guard and, exactly one year after graduating from Advanced Individual Training, deployed to Afghanistan with a unit assembled from across the state. The deployment gave her a deep sense of purpose, teamwork and belonging—she knew her mission and her role—and she continued to serve until 2015, when she was medically discharged.

"Most people cheer when they get that final certificate," she said. "I didn't. I sat down and cried."

In the months following her separation from service, Allen felt herself spiraling toward rock bottom, feeling disconnected from her purpose.

Things began to turn around with a friendly interaction at her local Department of Veterans Affairs clinic. Two volunteers in red vests, who happened to be members of DAV Chapter 7 in Lincoln, Nebraska, were greeting people as they came through the front door.

"They invited me to a chapter meeting," Allen said. "They told me there was food on Friday nights, and that was all it took."

Those Friday night chapter meetings became more than meals to Allen—they became a lifeline. She credits DAV with helping her navigate benefits and restoring a sense of belonging when she needed it most.

“I am one of those people who say that DAV saved my life. I’ve heard it from people, but it’s true for me too. So many veterans feel alone and don’t even know what resources are available. **DAV gave me purpose again.**”

—Melissa Allen

Top right: Melissa Allen (left) accepts the 2025 DAV Department of Nebraska Distinguished Service Award with Larry Zuhlke (right), commander of DAV Chapter 7 in Lincoln, Nebraska. **Bottom right:** Allen was already a lifelong gamer when she read an article in DAV Magazine about the organization’s gaming initiative.



“I am one of those people who say that DAV saved my life,” Allen said. “I’ve heard it from people, but it’s true for me too. So many veterans feel alone and don’t even know what resources are available. DAV gave me purpose again.”

Allen became a life member in 2022 and has been moving “100 miles per hour” since, building bridges between veterans and the resources they deserve. She splits her time volunteering at the VA as a benefits advocate, leading the Benefits Protection Team for the DAV Department of Nebraska and serving as adjutant of her chapter.

One thing she has learned from her work is that connection looks different for younger service members. Like Allen, many post-9/11 veterans served in remote, technology-driven environments and socialize accordingly.

“Gaming is social hour for this new generation of veterans. This is how we connect,” she said.

A gamer herself, Allen has played video games since childhood. Her first game, *Dungeon Master*, was on her dad’s computer. These days, she uses gaming differently.

Allen has found that getting the word out about DAV can be a challenge, but platforms like DAV’s Discord and Twitch channels allow her to meet a new group of veterans where they already are.

“DAV’s gaming program is one way to ensure no veteran is left behind in the digital age,” said DAV National Membership Director Lamarr Couser. “It’s

truly impressive to see it in action. Melissa is a great example of how creative and driven our members can be when it comes to helping others. She is out there creating real-life success stories.”

While streaming games like *Guild Wars*, Allen talks with viewers about veterans legislation and issues and even recruits new DAV members.

“It’s a welcoming environment for people to just share and be themselves without leaving home,” Allen said.

For Allen, DAV gaming platforms are simply new tools for an age-old purpose—keeping the camaraderie alive.

“It’s a great way to get involved,” she said. “It’s not hard. If you can use Facebook on your phone, you can use Discord.”

She welcomes all veterans and service members to join the community, even those who aren’t gamers.

“If nothing else, just join and watch,” she said. ■



Learn More Online

Want to join DAV’s gaming mission? Learn what it takes at dav.org/gaming.





SET UP TO SUCCEED

DAV is partnering with Warrior-Scholar Project to equip veterans seeking higher education

By Elizabeth DePompei

When Ryan Pavel didn't get accepted to his college of choice at 17 years old, a Marine Corps recruiter redirected his life's path.

"Instead of licking my wounds and just staying at home, I'm gonna go do something else," Pavel thought at the time.

He went on to serve as a linguist and deploy twice to Iraq. His time as a Marine was formative in shaping his world view, and he knew that once he separated, he wanted to return to school "with a lot more focus, a lot more drive," he said.

He did an online search for "Arabic, veterans and college," a non-strategy he doesn't recommend, but that led him to apply to the University of Michigan. His application was rejected.

"The difference was that, at that point, I had a lot more drive and I had grown," Pavel said. "And so I called the admissions office."

Pavel was told something simple but important: "You have to show you can be a good student." With that, he took community college classes on base and was conditionally accepted to Michigan, where he eventually earned his bachelor's degree. Later, he earned his law degree from the University of Virginia.

Turns out, he was a good student.

Now, as the CEO of the nonprofit Warrior-Scholar Project, Pavel uses the fails and wins of his educational journey to equip enlisted service members and veterans for success in higher education and beyond.

Warrior-Scholar Project's flagship academic programs place service members and veterans on college campuses for intensive, one-week boot camps in one of three tracks: college readiness, STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) and business.

Warrior-Scholar Project has served around 2,800 veterans through these boot camps and other workshops, and nearly 90% of boot camp alumni have completed or are on track to earn bachelor's degrees, like Marine veteran Paul Donato.

Donato, a DAV member, attended two back-to-back Warrior-Scholar boot camps in 2022: one in college readiness at Harvard University and one in STEM at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Motivated to enlist after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Donato served on active duty from 2008 to 2013 and in the Marine Reserve until 2016. He attended community college as a reservist, but Donato said he lacked direction, and the college experience didn't meet his expectations. He soon unenrolled and started working in manufacturing.

The next time he got the higher-ed bug, he discovered Warrior-Scholar Project. Unsure if he belonged in college, Donato said he was excited to be part of a program that understood the veteran experience.

What followed was a week of long, rigorous days of learning, discussion and assignments alongside like-minded people—like college.

"We're all there to be the best version of ourselves," Donato said. "And I think everybody came out of the program extremely hungry and eager to just learn."

Tom Nelligan, a former Army cryptologic linguist, is entering his junior year at Harvard University. Nelligan attended a Warrior-Scholar Project boot camp in 2022 while he was still on active duty. He knew he wanted to go to school after service, and at the time, he was particularly interested in Georgetown University, which is where the boot camp was held.

"It really just gives you the confidence to say that, yeah, I do belong in these places and these are not too far out of reach for me," Nelligan said. "It really gives you that agency of your own, kind of like destiny in a lot of ways, which is just remarkable."

In addition to Harvard and MIT, Warrior-Scholar also partners with Brown University, Yale, Princeton, Stanford, Michigan State and more.



Donato said he was also introduced to other resources supporting veterans, including DAV. DAV is partnering with Warrior-Scholar Project to deliver benefits webinars to its boot camp attendees and alumni, ensuring more veterans know about the benefits they've earned through service and how to access them.

The boot camps don't offer college credits, but that's not the point, Pavel said. The goal is to help service members and veterans envision what higher ed is really like and how it fits into their goals and to equip them for the transition into college or university.

After his two boot camps, Donato—who grew up in an immigrant household where work was prioritized over education—said he knew he wanted to return to school and had the confidence to believe that he could do anything.

Donato is now a sophomore at LaGuardia Community College majoring in applied math. He hopes to transfer to Princeton University and eventually work in equity research, providing financial analysis and recommendations to investors. ■



For More Information

The program is gearing up for its next series of boot camps, held in summer. Visit warrior-scholar.org to learn more and start the application process.



Army veteran Tom Nelligan attended a Warrior-Scholar boot camp toward the end of his enlistment. Afterward, he secured a spot at Harvard University where he's now a junior.

Creating a legacy that protects you, your family and DAV

Whether you call it gift planning, estate planning, legacy planning or any other term, please know that DAV has resources available to help you create a plan that protects your family and loved ones, lessens your tax burdens, and builds an impactful legacy that will help ensure the future of your family and our nation's veterans.



LEGACY PLANNING KIT

The Lesson Book shows you the steps to get started creating a plan to protect you and your family. The Record Book helps you keep all your important information in one place.



STOCK GIVING

By donating appreciated assets that you've held for more than a year, you can save on capital gains taxes and get a charitable deduction for the full value of your gift.



[FREEWILL.COM/DAV](https://freewill.com/dav)

You can use this no-cost online platform to create a legally binding last will and testament specific to the requirements of the state you live in.



BENEFICIARY DESIGNATIONS

Each institution has a specific process for naming beneficiaries (primary and secondary). You could also consider naming DAV as a beneficiary as a potential tax savings.



QUALIFIED CHARITABLE DISTRIBUTION—IRA

By making this type of donation directly to DAV, at age 70 1/2 or older, you remain in a tax bracket you're comfortable with and avoid adding any ordinary income.



CHARITABLE GIFT ANNUITY

A gift that pays you for a lifetime! This type of donation (\$10,000 or more) over age 60 can provide you with regular payments for life and allow DAV to further our mission.

Contact a gift planning expert
at **800-216-9802, press 1**,
or email giftplanning@dav.org.



To learn about more ways
to give, scan the QR code or
visit davplanmygift.org.



Virtual reality pain treatment expands for veterans



■ The Department of Veterans Affairs is expanding access to a U.S. Food and Drug Administration-authorized virtual reality (VR) therapy designed to treat chronic pain. The program offers a nondrug alternative for veterans, a community that experiences higher rates of persistent pain than the general population.

The program uses an eight-week curriculum that combines cognitive behavioral therapy, mindfulness and pain education. Veterans use a VR headset in their homes to engage with immersive environments that teach coping skills and breathing techniques. This approach aims to reduce reliance on opioids and invasive procedures by addressing both the psychological and physical aspects of pain.

The technology is now available under the VA's Federal Supply Schedule, allowing any VA provider to prescribe the treatment to eligible patients. Veterans using the program report significant improvements in pain levels, sleep quality and overall mental health.



Learn More Online

For more information about the program, scan the code or visit innovation.va.gov/hil/views/immersive/immersive.html.



Veteran suicide report released

■ The Department of Veterans Affairs released its National Veteran Suicide Prevention Report in February 2026, analyzing data through 2023. Total veteran suicides fell slightly from 6,422 in 2022 to 6,398 in 2023, averaging 17.5 deaths per day.

Despite this marginal decline, the report highlights a staggering gap in outreach: 61% of veterans who died by suicide in 2023 had not received VA health care during their final year of life. This disconnect underscores persistent barriers to care as the crisis evolves.

The VA maintains suicide prevention as its top clinical priority, offering same-day emergency mental health services at all facilities. However, the data reveals that reaching those outside the system remains a critical challenge. Physical pain, homelessness and

health problems continue to be primary risk factors for the veteran community, particularly among those ages 18 to 34.



For More Information

If you have questions or need assistance applying for VA health care, locate your nearest DAV service office at benefitsquestions.org.





From the **AUXILIARY NATIONAL COMMANDER** MELISSA L. PIERCE

Serving with intention honors our legacy

Throughout my time in the Auxiliary, I've been consistently struck by a single, powerful realization: We're the keepers of a century-old flame. When the DAV Auxiliary was founded in 1922, it was built on the radical idea that the family of a veteran serves a role just as vital as the veteran themselves. Today, that legacy isn't just a chapter in a history book—it's a living, breathing force in our communities.

We often talk about honoring the past, but true honor requires action. This year, that means serving with intention, looking at our mission with fresh eyes and asking ourselves how we can make the most meaningful difference in the lives of those we serve today. We see this legacy in motion every time a seasoned member mentors a newcomer or a unit adapts its outreach to meet the needs of a young, post-9/11 family. We're the bridge between the generations of heroes who came before and the families who are just beginning their journey with DAV.

However, a legacy is only as strong as the people carrying it. This is where the power of the unit comes in. One person can provide a meal or a ride, but a unit provides a community. In an era when many feel isolated, the Auxiliary offers something rare: a place where "I understand" doesn't need to be explained.

We're a force multiplier for DAV. When our units are strong and focused, our advocacy is louder, our volunteer hours are more impactful, and no veteran's family is left to navigate the complexities of transition alone. Every small act of service contributes to our collective #DAVAImpact250, proving that our reach is wider than we often realize.

Every new member we welcome and every hour we volunteer is a reinvestment in our promise to veterans. When we grow our ranks, we aren't just increasing a number on a roster; we're expanding our capacity to care. Volunteering isn't a task we check off a list; it's the heartbeat of our advocacy. It's the fuel that keeps our century-old flame burning.

And joining the Auxiliary is one of the easiest things you can do. Go to auxiliary.dav.org, and at the top right of the page, click "Join Auxiliary."

Our mission is too important to keep to ourselves. Let's reach out, invite others in and show them that the DAV Auxiliary isn't just an organization—it's a family. Thank you for your tireless dedication, your passion and your assurance that our legacy of service remains as vibrant today as it was over 100 years ago. ■

In an era when many feel isolated, the Auxiliary offers something rare: a place where "I understand" doesn't need to be explained.

One month at a time

Through decades of service and support, one veteran explains why she gives back month after month

By Nikki Herrmann

Like many veterans navigating life after service, Shannon Sander longed for the sense of belonging she once felt in the Air Force. When she moved to Florida and joined DAV Chapter 148 in Kissimmee, she found the camaraderie she'd been missing. After Sander was welcomed into the fold by her fellow members, her involvement quickly grew into a wide variety of volunteer and leadership roles.

Now, with over 26 years of membership, she has led at both the chapter and state levels. She's currently adjutant of DAV Chapter 15 in Henrietta, New York, where she volunteers as a benefits advocate, helping veterans, families and survivors access the benefits they've earned. Through those experiences, she's seen firsthand the impact DAV programs and services have on veterans' lives. That commitment to serving fellow veterans also shaped her decision to join the DAV Warriors Club.

The club was created as an exclusive opportunity for DAV life members to give back to their fellow veterans. Members make a monthly gift of \$21 or more to help sustain the programs and services veterans rely on. After learning more about monthly giving, Sander recognized how consistent support allows DAV to provide reliable assistance to veterans and their families year-round.

"Monthly giving gives DAV a sense of stability," Sander said. "It helps make sure we can respond quickly when veterans are in urgent need of assistance and continue providing the support they rely on."

Beyond providing steady support for DAV programs, monthly giving also simplifies the process for members who want to help. These donations are automated and convenient, removing the need to decide to give multiple times a year.



Air Force veteran Shannon Sander, a dedicated DAV life member and advocate, has spent more than two decades supporting fellow veterans through service and monthly giving, helping ensure DAV programs remain strong for those who need them most.

"Monthly giving is set and forget," Sander said. "I don't have to do anything different in my budget, and I already know what's happening."

Sander encourages fellow members to consider joining her in the DAV Warriors Club as a way to continue supporting the veterans they once served alongside and to carry forward the sense of brotherhood and sisterhood that doesn't end with military service.

"If you feel the desire to do it, then do it," she said. "If you've been helped by the organization, this is your way of giving back and taking care of your fellow members."

For Sander, supporting DAV through monthly giving is simply another way to continue serving the veteran community that has supported her.

"Shannon is a warrior for her fellow veterans, and the way she contributes sustains our cause and makes us a more efficient charity," said DAV National Adjutant Barry Jesinoski. "Veterans who are members have already sacrificed for their country. But there are a special few who join the DAV Warriors Club as a way to ensure our brothers and sisters aren't left behind." ■



Learn More Online

If you are interested in learning more about the DAV Warriors Club or how to start giving, visit dav.org/warriorsclub.



From the NATIONAL CHAPLAIN DEBRA VARNER DANCER

More than ‘thank you’



Showing appreciation for military veterans is more than just words. We saw this firsthand in April for our third annual DAV Community Impact Day, when thousands of volunteers across the country took time out of their day to honor veterans. Acts of service included holding cookouts, cleaning yards, visiting veterans’ homes and so much more.

They’re simple gestures, but these acts express gratitude and honor the contributions and sacrifices made by those who’ve served. Coupled with words of appreciation, they can foster meaningful connections and demonstrate sincere respect.

I encourage you to continue finding ways to honor veterans that go a little further than “thank you.” Perhaps it’s paying for the order of the veteran standing in line with you at the coffee shop. Maybe it’s committing to monthly visits to the assisted-care facility you went to for Community Impact Day. It could be signing up as a volunteer driver with the DAV Transportation Network. It may be as simple as a phone call to check in on someone you haven’t heard from in a while.

Each of these examples strengthens our community and demonstrates that we value the sacrifices made by those who’ve served or continue to serve.

But it goes beyond that.

When you demonstrate thanks instead of just saying the words, you’re creating a touchpoint. Your generosity or meaningful interaction could open up an opportunity to share about the community DAV offers and the work we do on behalf of veterans and their families.

That information could be lifesaving—it has been for others.

Acts of service inspire others. If you start a habit of demonstrating your thanks to a veteran, others will notice. They may observe quietly at first, but if you’re consistent, your actions may spur them to act.

That’s the ripple effect. And the more people who act, the more veterans feel seen, acknowledged and appreciated.

One final benefit is that people who haven’t worn the uniform will learn more about what military service means. They’ll hear the stories that helped shape the freedoms we enjoy today directly from the people who experienced them. They’ll learn that sometimes how veterans are portrayed in movies and shows is a myth or an exaggeration. They’ll see that veterans represent a broad cross-section of our nation, which can help lessen the military-civilian divide.

So make it a point to do more than offer thanks when you see a veteran. Slow down, take the time and put in the effort to make a small difference in someone’s life. ■

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Death of Past National Commander Al Linden

■ Past National Commander Albert “Al” Linden Jr. died Feb. 18 at 88 years old.

A service-connected disabled Army veteran, Linden commissioned as a second lieutenant immediately after graduating from college in 1959 and subsequently completed basic training, jump school, Ranger training and flight school. He volunteered for combat duty in Vietnam in 1965.

While he was serving with the 121st Aviation Company, his aircraft was struck by enemy fire, leading to the loss of his right leg below the knee. For many, that injury would have been the end of their military career. For Linden, it wasn't the end of anything.

He became the first leg amputee in Army history to return to flight status and went on to fly over 300 missions while logging over 400 hours of combat flight time. He earned the Purple Heart, multiple Air Medals



Linden

and the Legion of Merit before retiring as a major in 1969.

Although his time in uniform ended, his service didn't.

Linden poured his energy into serving his fellow veterans through DAV. As adjutant of the Department of Florida, he trained hundreds of service officers who went on to help thousands of veterans secure the benefits they had earned. He was elected national commander in 1985 and held numerous leadership positions

within the veteran community and through his career in civil service.

Linden is survived by his wife of 68 years, Patricia, and their son, Joseph.

“Al will be remembered for his steady leadership, unwavering commitment to his fellow veterans and a lifetime of dedicated service,” said DAV National Adjutant Barry Jesinoski. “We extend our deepest condolences to Patricia and the rest of the Linden family during this difficult time. May he rest in peace.”

REUNIONS

ARMY

1ST MILITARY INTELLIGENCE BATTALION (MIBARS)

July 19–21, Colorado Springs, CO, Contact: Don Skinner, Ph: 971-294-8898, Email: dons47@gmail.com, Web: sites.google.com/view/1stmibars/home

4TH BATTALION, 32ND ARMOR REGIMENT Aug. 7–8, Fredericksburg, VA, Contact: David Culbreth, Ph: 910-644-5464, Email: m1tanker43@gmail.com

173RD AIRBORNE BRIGADE ASSOCIATION

June 16–22, Rapid City, SD, Contact: Kimberly Hubbard, Ph: 619-884-9571, Email: kimberly@essential-lodging.com, Web: skysoldier.net/rapidcityreunion

504TH MILITARY POLICE BATTALION Sept. 15–17, Helen, GA, Contact: Tony Sills, Ph: 770-330-5236, Email: ctsills7147@bellsouth.net

BATTERY C, 2ND BATTALION, 17TH ARTILLERY REGIMENT July 24–26, St. Louis, MO, Contact: Jeff Wilcox, Ph: 616-581-9659, Email: wilcox.j79@att.net

NAVY

NAVAL MOBILE CONSTRUCTION BATTALION 12

(NMCB-12) June 23–26, Bath, ME, Contact: Bob Williams, Ph: 207-844-8142, Email: mcb12vietnam@gmail.com

USS ALAMO (LSD-33) Oct. 22–25, San Antonio, TX, Contact: Rick Robinson, Ph: 518-321-0622, Email: scienceteacherrick@gmail.com, Web: ussalamo.net

USS SOUTH DAKOTA DAY OF HONOR Aug. 8, for crew members and families of battleship BB-57 and submarine SSN-790, Location: Battleship South Dakota Memorial, Sioux Falls, SD, Contact: Diane Diekman, Ph: 605-271-0815, Email: info@battleshipsouthdakota.org

MARINES

1ST MARINE DIVISION ASSOCIATION Aug. 24–30, San Diego, CA, Contact: June Cormier, Ph: 760-763-3268, Email: June.oldbreed@fmda.us, Web: 1stmda.org

MARINE CORPS MOTOR TRANSPORT ASSOCIATION Sept. 20–24, Jacksonville, NC, Contact: George Hanlin, Ph: 301-514-1087, Email: secretary@usmcmta.org, Web: usmcmta.org

USMC WEATHER SERVICE (METOC) June 14–18, Binghamton, NY, Contact: Dave Englert, Ph: 812-630-2099, Email: englertd@psci.net, or Kathy Donham, Ph: 252-342-8459, Email: kathy.donham@hotmail.com

AIR FORCE

CAM RANH BAY AIR BASE Sept. 10–13, Colorado Springs, CO, Contact: Diana Westphal, Email: dicancook@gmail.com

SPOOKY AC-47 GUNSHIP Sept. 9–13, San Antonio, TX, Contact: Mike Acosta, Ph: 312-213-1308, Email: vengaboys5@hotmail.com, Web: spookyac47gunship.com

ALL SERVICES

VIETNAM HELICOPTER CREW MEMBERS ASSOCIATION

Aug. 12–16, Albuquerque, NM, Contact: Jim Sheridan, Ph: 901-850-0500, Email: vhcmaed@sprynet.com, Web: vhcma.org

INQUIRIES

• Searching for Leon MacLemore. Leon was in the bed next to me when I was in the hospital on the island of Okinawa between January and April 1965. Leon had lost both of his legs in Vietnam. Contact: Leonard Thompson, Ph: 619-701-4820

- Searching for anyone who was attached to Taipei, Taiwan, AMT, 1970–71. Contact: David Franco, Ph: 412-913-4142, Email: df0367@gmail.com
- Searching for Air Force comrades who were in Da Nang, Vietnam, in January 1968 during the Tet Offensive, particularly those who worked on or around C-123 aircraft or served as aircraft mechanics. Seeking anyone who remembers early-morning attacks on the barracks, during which I was knocked through a stairwell handrail and fell two stories while rushing to the bunker. Contact: Karl Hockenberry, Email: karlgh@juno.com

PLANNING A REUNION?

We welcome submissions from our readers for reunions and inquiries. Email the details to feedback@dav.org. Submissions must be received at least six months before the event date and are subject to editing for clarity, style, accuracy, space and propriety.

REUNION STORIES

DAV is interested in stories about veterans who connected via the Reunions section of *DAV Magazine*. If you have a story you would like to share, please email feedback@dav.org.



VOLUNTEER APPLICATIONS NOW AVAILABLE

2026 National Disabled Veterans Golf Clinic

Sept. 13-18 | Riverside Hotel & Golf Resort

Come be part of a veteran's journey to recovery and healing by volunteering at the National Disabled Veterans Golf Clinic in Riverside, Iowa.

This annual clinic is a premier adaptive sports program co-presented by DAV and the Department of Veterans Affairs that provides the opportunity to experience the therapeutic benefits of golf and other activities to veterans with blindness and low vision, brain injuries, amputations, spinal cord injuries, and other qualifying disabilities.

With more than 200 veterans expected, the clinic relies on hundreds of dedicated volunteers serving as clinic staff and golf buddies to provide an invigorating and rehabilitative experience for its participants. ■



There are still volunteer opportunities available, and those interested must apply by **June 5**. Scan the QR code or visit **veteransgolfclinic.org/volunteer** for more information and to apply.



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